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PORTRAIT

ELIAS GOLDENSKY, PHOTOGRAPHER

THE MODERN IDEA IN PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE

BY C. H. CLAUDY

IT is idle to contend that the photographic portrait can ever rival, much less displace, the painted portrait. But that the work of the photographic portaitists of the present day goes far beyond those lifeless renditions of form and outline, those imitations of other processes, or those vague and hysterical mysteries which have marked milestones in the progress of the art, must be evident to any student who will look with unprejudiced eyes upon good modern examples.

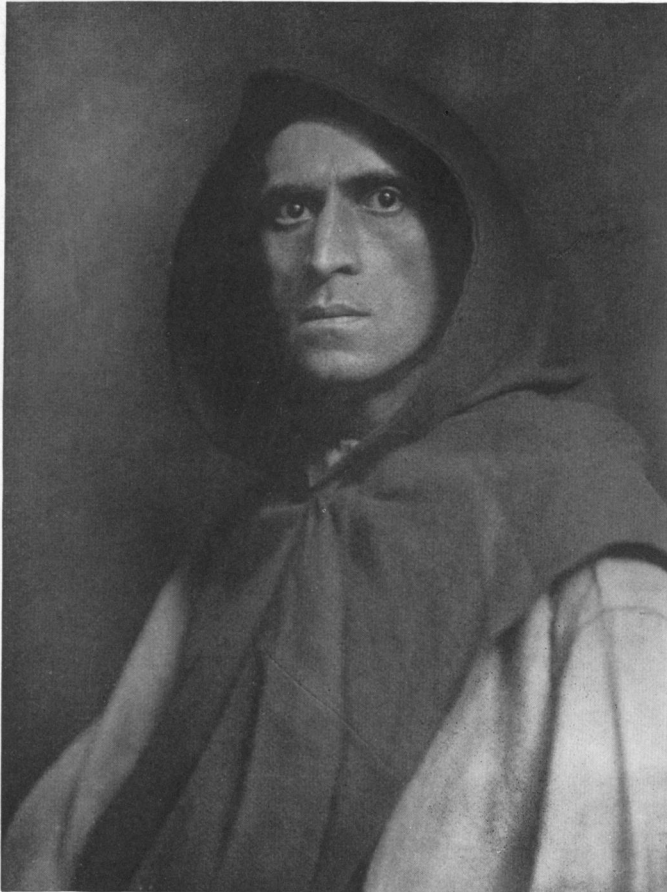
The photographer who makes a really

artistic portrait his aim, looks upon sincerity and simplicity as the keynotes upon which his work must rest. He realizes fully both the camera's greatest asset—its unrivaled ability to tell the truth—and its greatest drawback—the fact that it can but render a picture of the sitter as he or she may be at the moment. To make the most of the one, to minimize the disadvantages of the other, is the constant effort of those who use the eye of science in the field of art.

Such photographers consider the lens

and plate as the least of their tools. They work with light, and its control, with the subject, to make him assume that attitude, that expression, which is most typical of him as he really is. They work with drapery, knowing that a false move, an illy considered fold, a badly placed mass,

he uses to reflect the light: for though photography gives monochromatic results, the colors of the original must be correctly rendered as to their relative luminosity or the photograph will belie that truth-telling ability which is the camera's greatest charm.



THE MONK

CHAS. WESLEY HEARN. PHOTOGRAPHER

cannot be eliminated or corrected, as it can so readily be by the painter.

The modern photographer knows that, if the lens is properly made and used, he will automatically be provided with perfect drawing in his results. But he also knows that modeling, the rendering of his subject "in the round," is a matter entirely of previous arrangement of light, reflectors, background, even the colors

Just how the successful portraitist accomplishes his ends varies with the man as much as methods vary with the painter. In the picture here reproduced of the work of Elias Goldensky, acknowledged everywhere as a leader in his art, both simplicity and sincerity are well exemplified. The portrait of the boy is obviously sincere, pretending to be nothing but what it is—no "effects" of light and shade, no



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F. E. BRONSON, PHOTOGRAPHER

dramatic contrasts, no tricks of retoucher's pencil or printer's "dodging" have been used. Simplicity, inherent in the subject and the easy, natural pose, has been heightened by the use of what the photographer calls a "short scale." Having to render color in shades of monotone, many photographers persuade themselves that only by running the gamut from most Stygian shadow to most brilliant highlight can they create the illusion of color. Not so Goldensky. Disregarding the quite incidental shadow beneath the arm, the whole picture is in a light, airy key, yet without brilliance or what the theatrical photographer calls "punch." The picture is soft, without hard lines or too narrow

and microscopic detail, yet it has no tendency towards the "out of focus" atrocities which, imitating impressionism at its worst, have none of the virtues either of that school or of photography.

Modeling of the flesh, in the softly rounded face, the chubby leg and smooth, unmuscular hands, is well accomplished by this softly controlled light. The artist has fitted his tools to the work in hand, with the result that he has rendered a picture of a child which must please not only as a likeness, but by its rendition of that spirit of childhood which we all think of as innocent, joyous, untroubled, unlabored, untheatric.

In strong contrast to this example of a



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RUDOLPH EIKEMEYER, JR., PHOTOGRAPHER

master photographer's work with a child, is Hearn's "Monk." A fancy picture, perhaps more than a portrait, the photographer has allowed the grimness of his subject to find full play in the choice of lighting, and the use of a steep scale of tones. Deep black shadows under the hood merge without gradation into the somewhat pitiless lighting in which no attempt has been made to soften the somewhat ascetic modeling of the face. It would have been both easy and simple to have thrown a shadow-softening light into the hood which shrouds the head, and while to have done so would undoubtedly have resulted in a more "pretty" modeling,

the strength of the face and the ruggedness of the whole would have been destroyed by such a course. Here again is simplicity and, doubtless, sincerity, yet obtained by totally opposite means than those Goldensky used. Incidentally, the two pictures show a painter's trick in the photographer's hands. The boy, lighter than his background, stands out from it. The monk, his cowl darker than the surface behind it, stands close against a wall—by inference, that of cell or monastery.

The history of any art shows first the development of an effect, second, the simplifying of the means by which that effect can be produced. Photography is

no exception, and at times its masters go to extreme lengths, apparently for the mere satisfaction of accomplishment. Rudolph Eikemeyer, a photographic prophet of the light, the airy, the graceful, the dainty, shows such an effort in his portrait of a young girl, reproduced here. Not until one analyzes this picture is the secret of its success discovered in the fact that the photographer has depended wholly upon a single contrast to separate his masses and to express his feeling of the character of the young and innocent face he pictures. There is almost no differentiation between flesh tones and those of the background, almost a total absence of shadow, as such. Only the drooping masses of hair relieve this portrait from being distressingly flat. The photographer has restrained himself to the limit from utilizing any contrast between thrown shadow and cast highlight, depending wholly on his arrangement of hair, with only a suggested leaf or so to relieve its plainness, his somewhat lackadaisical pose of the hands and a direct clear glance from two dark eyes, to make his picture "carry," again to borrow from the vocabulary of the theatrical photographer. A picture so without any recourse to the main weapons in the photographer's armory can not but be noticeable, when it succeeds because of its quiet restraint and not in spite of it.

That some of the special means of the photographic process are sometimes available for successful use in an artist's hands,

the very quiet, low-toned portrait by Bronson is sufficient evidence. A soprano song can be made possible for a contralto if the pitch is lowered. So can a brilliant lighting be successfully quieted by a lowering of the whole key throughout. It is not always possible to do this under the light itself—curtaining and screening the light reduce its shadow-casting power and diffuse its highlights. Therefore, as in this case, the photographer at times gets a low toned result by lowering the whole scale *after* the lighting is made, a thing he can do by chemical means. In any lighting, the simple pose, the good lines and quiet restfulness of this figure would be pleasing, but the short, low scale of tones, the highest highlight lower in tone than the deepest shadow in the face of the Eikemeyer portrait, adds here a special charm.

Softness of focus, to prevent masses being bounded by hard lines, complete control of light and shade, a trained wit to conjure that expression and arrange that pose most suggestive of the person as a whole, simplicity, sincerity, absence of dramatic, striking and bold use of too great contrast, restraint both in pose and expression and correct rendition of color in monotone—these, and a greater and greater appreciation of the value of the camera's power for telling the truth, are the factors which have raised the modern idea in photographic portraiture, if not yet among the arts, at least to a highly honored place among the crafts.

THE HARVEST

By TYLER McWHORTER

Professor of Applied Design, Saint Paul Institute

What reaps the Artist from the joyous seed
Sown of his soul?

What price but the joy of the sowing done?

The rest is the love of his precious Art

That is echoed back from another heart

A hundred fold.